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Cross - Oration - Newburyport , July 4, 1822



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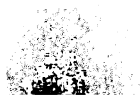


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New England
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November 26, 1917





AN

ORATION

DELIVERED AT

NEWBURYPORT.

ON THE FORTY-SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1822.

BY ROBERT CROSS.

NEWBURYPORT,
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Minutes of the Club

July 5, 1822

Resolved that the thanks of the Club be presented to Mr. Robert Cross, for his able and patriotic Oration, delivered yesterday at their request ; and that the Hon. Ebenezer Mosefey, Mr. John R. Hudson, and Col. Abraham Williams, be a committee to communicate the same, and request a copy for the press.

At a meeting of the NEWBURYPORT DEBATING CLUB, held at their room, on Friday evening, July 5, 1822 :

Voted, That the thanks of the Club be presented to Mr. ROBERT CROSS, for his able and patriotic Oration, delivered yesterday at their request ; and that the Hon. Ebenezer Mosefey, Mr. John R. Hudson, and Col. Abraham Williams, be a committee to communicate the same, and request a copy for the press.

S. KETTELL, Secretary.

ORATION.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

IF we carry back our minds to the memorable period of American Independence, and survey the interval that has since elapsed, it is with feelings of joy, and sorrow, and astonishment. In this space, so inconsiderable in point of time, what a multitude of stupendous events have happened ! What mighty revolutions have been accomplished in the condition of mankind ! In spreading them out before us, and looking at them at one view, we feel almost dizzy at the prospect ; we can hardly believe, that such momentous events have all happened within the memory of living men. Occurrences, which in other days were heard with fear and wonder, sound, in comparison with these, as tame and as familiar as “a tale thrice told.”

How much there is within this brief period, which humanity will never cease to mourn ! How much there is of oppression, and cruelty wantonly inflicted ; of heartless ambition, reckless of the means employed to effect its ends ; of crime perpetrated in the name of justice ;

and of selfishness and malevolence, masking themselves under the air and bearing of virtue and patriotism. We have seen blood poured forth like water; war, and discord, and rapine, let loose to prey uncontrolled on society; and those whom the world had never before approached, but with humiliation and reverence, the amiable, and the accomplished, the high in rank, and the venerable in years, we have witnessed expiring by an ignominious death, on the scaffold.

These things are deplorable. But in the worst of them there is something consolatory; something, which makes us recall with satisfaction, what we might otherwise turn from with horror. Amidst those scenes, which violate common decency and humanity, we discern others, which give us nobler conceptions of the dignity of human nature, and brighter and more exalted hopes of the destiny of man. The tempestuous character of the times, has called the energies of the human mind most powerfully into operation. A spirit of enquiry has been abroad, which has no parallel in the history of past generations. The slavish political dogmas, which had commanded the superstitious veneration of ages, have given place to the grand and inestimable principles of liberty; and under the salutary influence of these principles, we behold every where springing up a spirit of improvement, which is destined to widen, and to purify, and to perpetuate the sources of national happiness and prosperity.

These remarks will not be thought improper on a day set apart to commemorate the American independence. Without adverting to the direct influence the Revolution had in accelerating a general change of political principles, and the consequent convulsions in Europe,

both events may be traced to the operation of the same general causes.

The progress of the human mind towards improvement is irresistible, but slow. Here and there arises a man, or a class of men, superior to the opinions of their age. But much time must elapse, before truths, clear and familiar to them, become undoubted and notorious principles. Hence the causes, which produced the wonderful changes for which our times are remarkable, had been accumulating in number, and force, for ages, before they were sufficiently ripe, to leave a general and permanent effect on the structure of society.

Before the acquisition of the magnetic needle, and the brilliant discoveries to which that event led, the nobleman and the slave were the only distinct ranks known in society. Even the privileges of the famous Magna Charta, so justly the boast of an Englishman, were granted only to the nobles, as if the rights of any other order, were not worth consideration. At this period, commerce was confined to brief and timid excursions along the adjacent coasts; trade was merely an occasional traffick for a few necessary articles; and both, from the sordid character of those who practised them, were held dishonorable. Men had therefore no alternative, but to range themselves among the dependents of the nobles, or to submit to the austerities and deprivations of a monastick life. But the discovery of the compass, imparted an adventurous character to commerce, which took off its reproach. Kings, and nobles, and prelates, were eager to extend to it their patronage, and to reap the promised harvest of wealth and honor. Thenceforth it was possible, honorably to engage in some occupation other than that of arms and religion; and

thenceforth the lower orders began to throw off their original servitude, and to rise to surpass their masters in actual power and influence.

As yet however, this cause had but a partial effect. It improved the condition of society, without materially altering its constituent elements. The modes of thinking and feeling were the same, though directed to different objects. Men, the most distinguished of the age for their attainments, were willing to admit the edict of a Pope conveyed a sacred and indefeasible title to the possession of the Indies.

But at length the influence of this cause, and its grand auxiliary of the reformation, penetrated the whole mass of society, and operated a thorough alteration in its character. At length the spell, which had bound up the faculties of the human mind was dissolved. Through the thousand channels of commerce, wealth and abundance poured into the remotest quarters of society. With wealth came intelligence, and enterprize, and independence, with which it is ever accompanied. The control of public opinion, succeeded to the influence of kindred and clanship. From out of that portion of society, which before seemed a mass of uniform ignorance, superstition, and brutality, other and numerous classes sprang up, with new and peculiar feelings and interests. The nobles ceased to retain the commanding position, they had once occupied in the social body, and gradually sunk into the insignificant character of useless, but indispensable appendages, to the idle pageantry of a court.

Thus was the constitution of society completely altered. And such an alteration requires a correspondent reformation in government. It will of itself effect it,

wherever opinion is not overawed by military power. Happily the natural enemies of liberal principles did not resort to this expedient. They wandered on securely, to the very brink of the precipice, before they were informed of their danger.

The numerous, and wealthy, and intelligent classes, which recent circumstances had called into being, soon discerned how utterly disproportioned, was their actual position in the political scheme, to that, in which as important, and influential members of the social body, they ought to have been placed. It was impossible, they should not perceive, it was inconsistent with the express design of society, to debar them forever from all participation in the direction of those concerns, that were common to the whole people. We, said they, constitute the great body of the population, an object at all times of fear and suspicion to the few; and is it not unsafe to be dependent for our liberty and lives on the caprice of a power beyond our control? We elevated the nation from a torpid state of ignorance and apathy, into the condition of an active and intelligent community. We reared up those individuals; who have imparted the lustre of literary fame, and martial renown, to the national name. We supplied the vital principle which maintains the functions of government in operation. And is it just to debar us from all influence in its administration? Questions like these, naturally suggested themselves to the members of the recently created classes, as they gradually rose in consequence. The answer carried home to every bosom the necessity of adopting a system of government, more conformable to the existing state of society; a system in which the several classes should possess the influ-

ence due to their importance in the community, and which should secure their rights and interests, from being trifled with or trampled upon by others.

It was this grand result, to which the causes which had been accumulating for ages, had been slowly but inevitably leading. It was impossible, that men should become more intelligent, and not perceive the enormous defects of existing political systems. They had become inefficient, even for the ordinary purposes of government, much less were they adapted to the circumstances of a wealthy and refined nation. Nothing but that feeling, which prompts us indiscriminately to venerate, whatever our fathers have loved or honored, could have preserved them so long. In their outlines, as they were sketched by the warlike and independent tribes of ancient Scandinavia, the feudal institutions were eminently favorable to freedom. To these wild hordes belongs the honor of having originated the idea of a practicable system of free government, which had employed the imaginations of ancient sages in vain to invent. But their illiterate chieftains were not able to discern the remoter tendencies of the customs they introduced. Nor if they had discerned them, would they, with their swords in their hands and a numerous retinue of gallant warriors and kinsmen around them, have been likely to have regarded them. Hence the subtilty of politicians at a later and less martial period, had ingrafted on the parent stock, doctrines the most repugnant to its original principles.

The improvement of society, and the defects of existing systems concurred then, in advancing the period of political regeneration. To accelerate this event, its friends had put in requisition the most powerful means

of awakening, and directing the public mind. The press, where its efforts were not cramped by legislative restrictions, was teeming with their publications. The theatre, the forum, the saloon, and the academick hall were converted into schools of reform; and poets and philosophers, who have sometimes been justly charged with servility to existing powers, but, oftener honorably distinguished for a firm attachment to the cause of freedom, endeavored to inspire their countrymen, with such tastes, and sentiments, as would lead to their emancipation.

With so many causes cooperating to excite them, is there anything to surprize us in the revolutions, we have lately witnessed in Europe? Do we not rather wonder they were delayed so long, and have not as yet terminated? The inevitable hour, which for centuries had been in anticipation, was rapidly approaching, and by what expedient could it be averted? Did princes put their trust in that blind feeling of loyalty, which had so long bound the people to their hereditary masters? That period of infatuation, when the people looked up to their rulers with reverential awe, as to a divinity, had passed away. The veil, which had shrouded them from the scrutiny of the vulgar eye, had been torn off, as that from the famous impostor of eastern story; which disclosed, not as he had led his deluded followers to expect, a countenance, in which the radiance of a celestial light, beamed too bright for mortal eye to look upon; not that mysterious mark, which the hand of heaven had engraven on his forehead, as the seal of his divine mission; but features, in which the lines of natural deformity, were contrasted with the bloated traces of debauchery and disease. Thus aban-

doned by their people, deprived of the sole props of their authority, whither could these unfortunate men flee for refuge? The hour of retribution, when in danger, in deprivation, or in death, they were destined to feel the full, and bitter effects, of the past misrule of their ancestors, was coming on, and nothing could avert it. They had only the hard alternative, of stooping from their exalted station, to accede to the united wishes of their people, or of collecting all the remaining strength, that the exhausted sources of venality could supply, and silently to await the shock of popular violence.

We have witnessed what they did; we have also witnessed its tremendous consequences. Soothed for a time in vain, the revolution burst with aggravated fury, upon France, dragging into its impetuous vortex, the best, in common with the most obnoxious institutions. Thence sweeping, like the blast of the desert, which bears death, indeed, to the unwary traveller, but carries mingled with its noxious particles, the seeds which are destined to spring up, into beautiful and luxuriant plants, it spread into different countries; every where effecting the restoration of original principles, and planting the banners of reform, on the ruins of despotism.

Germany, and Spain, and Portugal, have successively felt its renovating influence; and even the forgotten spirits of Greece, and Rome, where they had been for ages, lingering with fruitless recollection over the fields of Marathon, and Pharsalia, roused at the general cry for freedom, and awakened in the sons, the feelings that distinguished their illustrious ancestors.

I have thus endeavored to give a rapid sketch of the course of events, that led to the reformation of political principle, and the commotions that followed it, in Europe. It may seem a more presumptuous inquiry, whether these are destined to continue, or subside, at length, in universal tranquillity. But the causes that produced them, are still in full operation; and though circumstances may render the period more or less remote, still it must finally arrive, when what remains of the broken, and crumbling political systems of the old world must fall, and give place to constitutions founded on the basis of equal rights. We have seen, during the past year, with how irresistible an energy these causes operate, in the new republics, that have burst forth into existence on our own continent. Was there ever a people so oppressed by a government, so enslaved by superstition, so borne down in every conceivable manner, and in every possible situation, as the unfortunate natives of South America. In looking at their origin, their past history, and their condition prior to the revolution, one might say, that here was a nation, destined to be a signal example of the degraded state, to which a people may be reduced, by the folly and wickedness of its rulers. But in the depths of their affliction, from the banks of the Oronoco, the cry of resistance was heard, and spread with electric rapidity through the provinces. From the vale of Mexico, to the luxuriant pastures of Chili, the standard of independence was unfurled. The gale, which sweeping from their shores, lately brought to our ears, but the clang of arms, and the sighs of multitudes panting for deliverance, now bears on its bosom the acclamations of victory, mingled with the choral anthems of freedom. We

hail their entrance into the grand fraternity of free governments. May their future career be as prosperous, as the past conflict has been bloody and manfully sustained ; and when fifty years shall have seen them, free and independent, may they recal, the names of Bolivar, Iturbide, and the revolt, with as much gratitude, and admiration, as we remember the Revolution and Washington.

The same causes, that have worked out so glorious a result in favor of this injured people, are still acting in Europe, and with constantly augmented vigor. Though less clear and palpable in their effects, than formerly, they are not therefore the less operative. Though the open conflict between power and right seems for a time suspended, it is only to collect new strength for a fresh onset. Though he, who was reared up by providence to accelerate the operation of these causes ; he, the tyrant, converted into an involuntary instrument of deliverance to his species, lies where he can no more intimidate or annoy ; though the northern Alexander, stands ready to pour his hosts of disciplined barbarians, wherever the cry so obnoxious to a despot's ear, shall first be heard ; and England looks supinely on, while nations around her are struggling for privileges, it is her boast to have enjoyed so long ; still the grand cause of human improvement shall not be checked .It is impossible to arrest the sun in his course through the the heavens. It is impossible to extinguish the insuppressible energies of mind.

“ Yet Freedom, yet thy banner, torn but flying,
“ Streams, like the thunder storm, against the wind.
“ Thy trumpet voice, though broken now, and dying,
“ The loudest yet, the tempest leaves behind.”

I know there are many, who do not look on the commotions that have lately agitated Europe, with a very favorable eye. They are shocked at the idea, of plunging a nation into that tumultuous state, without which, few revolutions are unaccompanied. They think it better, passively to submit to existing evils, than to apply so harsh a remedy ; and to trust to the gradual progress of intelligence, for the melioration of the political condition of nations. These sentiments arise from the most amiable feelings, and are highly honorable to those who possess them. But they are founded in the error, that a reformation, in the gradual and pacific mode they would recommend, is practicable. As if princes will become less tenacious of their legitimacy, and prerogative, in proportion as the improvement of society renders them more valuable ! As if the crude and bungling political systems of Europe, can be pared down, and refined, into a rational and consistent system like our own ! Suppose the intelligence of an oppressed people to be carried to its utmost possible limit, still, while the principles of human nature continue what they are ; while man grapples fast to what he possesses, and strives to obtain more, regardless of the rights, the wants, and the complaints of others ; force, more or less of it, must be resorted to, in order to effect a change in the government. The history of our own revolution can teach us, that an ambitious and tyrannical sovereign, will never yield, even to the most righteous demands of his subjects, till the impossibility of resisting any longer, has deprived him of all power to refuse.

An oppressed people, struggling to be free, have a cause, which ought to receive the sincere and ardent

prayers of every well-wisher of the human race. It is not a conflict, merely between one form of government and another, between absolute monarchy and republicanism. In this cause, darkness is arrayed against light; prescription against reason; superstition against religion; and the infallibility of power against the eternal principles of justice. To the event of such a contest, no American can be indifferent. We have tested the worth of what other nations are striving to obtain, and we know it is something more, than merely an unsubstantial name. Among us were first developed the full effects of those causes, which are now working out their proper results in Europe. Here, was first shewn what can be effected by a people, who have intelligence enough to understand their rights, and spirit to assert them. Behold a few and thinly scattered colonies, destitute of friends, and resources fearlessly declaring war, on one of the most potent nations of the globe. For what? To relieve themselves from great and urgent evils, by which any people, driven to desperation, may be hounded into a war, without fear, and without hope? To gratify a rapacious lust for plunder, which sometimes induces the needy and feeble, to attack the strong and the rich? No! For neither of these causes; but from an hostility to a law, inconsiderable in its immediate effect, but which involved a principle dangerous to the rights of their posterity. For this, our fathers, on this day, boldly bid defiance to a nation, whose arms had been carried in triumph over three quarters of the globe, and whose navies literally ruled the ocean. And every succeeding anniversary, has brought with it new proofs, of the foresight, and wisdom, of those patriots,

who achieved our independence, and devised the constitution on which we rely for its security. No longer is it made our reproach, that infatuated by a desire after an unnatural, and impracticable perfection in government, we have adopted a system which the slightest shock will be sufficient to overturn. They who laughed to scorn our institutions, are now employed in imitating them ; and they who hoped, and they who feared, their speedy dissolution, join together in the general sentiment of approbation. War, with all its burthens, and embarrassments, embargoes as afflictive as wars, faction as wide in its influence, and as rancorous in its spirit, as was ever witnessed in any country, have come in succession, to fill many a mind with anxiety and alarm for their security. But this period of wars, embargoes, and cabals, has passed away, and the constitution has come forth from its fiery ordeal, with firmness augmented by the trial. None now ask, if it does not repose with the executive an excessive, and dangerous authority, that feature, which in the diseased imagination of some men, seemed a monster destined to swallow up all our rights. None now ask, if it does not suppose more intelligence in the people, than is consistent with a large population. None now ask, if the extent of our territory is not incompatible with any modification of a republican government. When such interrogatories are put, we have but to look around us, and we find every where a full and satisfactory reply. We see it, in the common feeling of union and harmony, with which all are animated. We see it in the rapidly accumulating wealth and power of our country. We see it in the increased estimation in which she is held in the eyes of

foreign powers; and we feel it, in the conscious pride which thrills in every bosom, at the name of America.

So fortunate a condition at present, is a fair and auspicious omen of future prosperity. It is hardly possible, that so many circumstances, dangerous to our unity and independence, and welfare as a nation, should soon again arise, as we have already experienced. May our just anticipations be fully realized. May our fortune hereafter be as prosperous, as it has yet been felicitous. May our land continue still proudly conspicuous, as "the asylum of the brave and unfortunate and the home of the free." May science, and literature, and the arts, shed their benign and ennobling influence on our character, and the spirit of peace and harmony maintain its mild dominion over our land; so that at every succeeding anniversary, we may have fresh occasion to be grateful to heaven, that we are born Americans.



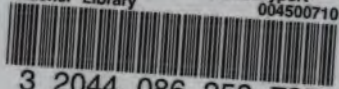
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